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THE JAPANESE PROBLEM IN CALIFORNIA

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The object of the present paper is rather to state a problem than either to suggest a remedy or to assume the position of arbitrator between the conflicting interests. For many years the Japanese have been an irritation in California. For many years the newspapers of the state—and notably the San Francisco "Chronicle," a journal of responsible conservatism—have drawn attention to the increasing numbers of Japanese immigrants and the consequent injury to the interests of the country. Some five years ago these complaints came energetically to a head. Statistics were compiled from the scanty material at command, opinions were collected, and grievances stated, with the result that the Japanese question became an issue of magnitude.

California had already passed through a race agitation against the Chinese that at one time threatened a formidable convulsion. Was she upon the high road to another and a more dangerous protest against a people flushed with the successes of a great war and in no mood to tolerate adverse discrimination? The gravity of the issue made it difficult to halt between two opinions. The last legislature was nearly equally divided between the anti-Japanese who wished to impose various restrictions upon the Asiatics, and those who may not have been pro-Japanese but who were at least unwilling to do anything that might embarrass the federal government. The governor of the state and the speaker of the assembly threw their weight against the proposed legislation. Even the anti-Japanese press admitted that the time was inopportune for restrictions, and so the agitation temporarily subsided. That it will be renewed there cannot be the slightest doubt.

The discussion served many good ends. It gave cohesion and a voice to the interests that believed themselves to be specifically threatened by the Japanese invasion. It brought to the front also those other interests that held themselves to be directly benefited. It had the effect of arousing the serious interest of the Japanese

government and persuading it to energetic measures for the abatement of a nuisance dangerous to itself. The activities of the great immigration companies of Japan were discouraged and a system of passports was imposed upon the emigrating classes. Whether as a result of these measures or from other causes, it is certain that the incoming stream has been substantially lessened,—we shall presently see to what extent.

That there are classes who favor as well as disfavor the Japanese is an important point, and we have no right to assume selfish or unsocial motives either in one case or the other. If it can be urged against the labor unionist of San Francisco that he keeps exclusively in view his own wage scale and his class domination, so in the same way can the fruit grower be charged with an indifference to the well-being of the community at large so long as he can always find a sufficiency of underpaid Asiatics to do his work and to save him the expense of sanitation and of hygienic conditions. It is better to avoid the assumption of sinister motives.

San Francisco has had to stand the brunt of the Asiatic invasion and her voice is naturally the loudest. In many instances we need no deep research to see that the complaints are well founded. Japanese shoe repairing shops, for instance, are to be found dotted all over the city. Japanese laundries are nearly as numerous. There are hundreds of Japanese janitors, and Japanese house cleaners, while the invasion of other branches of activity is steady and persistent. Divisions of the city are becoming known as Japanese quarters, and Japanese stores in a chronic state of "selling off" are to be found everywhere. All these things mean the dispossession of white men. The Japanese shoe repairing shops are said without contradiction to be controlled and financed by a capitalist of Tokyo, who requires that each of his beneficiaries shall take an apprentice who will in due time start his own shop with his own apprentice. And all these things mean not merely competition, but underselling. The Japanese will enter into no trade agreement, he will respect no standard of prices. He is a law unto himself, and his only rule is to get the business at any and every cost. It is not surprising that the opinion among the wage earners of San Francisco is nearly unanimous. The presence of the Japanese trader means that the white man must either go out of business or abandon his standard of comfort and sink to the level of the Asiatic, who will sleep under

his counter and subsist upon food that would mean starvation to his white rival.

A glance at statistics, so far as they are available, will help us to understand the situation and to measure the danger. Conservative estimates of the number of Japanese now in California vary from 45,000 to 50,000. The general census report of 1900 gives the number at 10,151. The records show that the Japanese landed from foreign ports from October, 1899, to September, 1904, numbered 10,524. During 1903 and 1904 7,270 Japanese arrived from Hawaii, but there are no figures for Hawaiian arrivals for the two years ending December 31, 1903. During 1904 Japanese to the number of 672 arrived from Victoria, but there is no record from this source for the previous three years. For the two years ending September 30, 1906, the net increase of arrivals over departures at San Francisco was 13,658, and for the subsequent two years the increase was 1,213. These sadly incomplete figures represent a total of 43,488. Even were they complete there would still be no inclusion of the Japanese who enter unregistered or surreptitiously from Canada and from Mexico. They are certainly numerous.

The distribution of these people affords an explanation of the louder complaints emanating from San Francisco. Assuming the total to be 45,000—certainly underestimated—we find 12,000 in San Francisco, 6,000 in Los Angeles, 9,000 in the vicinities of Sacramento and Fresno, and 18,000 in all other parts of the state.

The year 1908 witnessed a marked decrease in the Japanese population, due partly to the numbers who returned to their own country and partly to the efforts of the Japanese government to restrict emigration. From October 1, 1906, to October 1, 1907, the net increase was 3,719, while from October 1, 1907, to October 1, 1908, we have a decrease of 2,506, the net result for the two years being an increase of only 1,213.

While opinion in San Francisco is nearly unanimous as to the undesirability of the Japanese as residents and traders, it must be admitted that there is by no means such unanimity among the fruit growers of the country districts. Labor is always hard to obtain upon the fruit ranch, and the Asiatic is frequently welcomed as an alternative to a partial loss of the fruit crop. The Bureau of Labor statistics furnish us with the opinions of 132 farmers upon the advantages of Japanese labor. Nearly all of them employ Asiatics,

but while some of them do so willingly the majority seem to make a virtue of necessity. Here are some half-dozen quotations from the reports, taken almost at random :

Whites, we regret to say, are the least dependable, and Japanese are only half as good as Chinese.

I find that the Japanese as a rule take care of their money and work steadier than the white laborer.

They (Asiatics) are very poor help to employ by the day or month.

I do not employ any Japanese. You cannot depend on them.

I have no use for Japanese. I like the Chinese better. You cannot depend on the Japanese: they will strike when you are busy and a contract with them don't amount to anything.

I have employed both the Chinese and Japanese on my ranch, and find that I like the Chinese the better, for if you are exceedingly rushed a Chinaman will not strike for higher wages and leave you in the lurch, as the Jap surely does.

I am opposed to the exclusion of the Japanese. We would be in a bad fix without their help. I prefer them to the kind of white men who apply for work.

Wherever we find comparisons between the Japanese and the Chinese it is always to the disadvantage of the former. A common practice is to rent the fruit orchard to the Japanese or to sell to them the standing crop, leaving all the responsibilities of harvest and market to the purchaser. Opinions as to the morality and reliability of the Japanese are nearly always adverse. Many of the reports complain that the Japanese never loses an accidental advantage, and never allows contract or promise to stand in the way of attainment. The need of the white man is the opportunity for the Japanese, and he never fails to take it.

It may be supposed that the 132 farmers who furnished their opinions to the Bureau of Labor are too few in number to form a basis for an adequate estimate of the general sentiment. That fact was doubtless taken into consideration by the last California legislature when it ordered the preparation of a census of all the Japanese in the state and the collection of information concerning them. These instructions are now being carried out and in the fullest way. Within a few months we shall have not only adequate statistics, but a very large mass of information upon well nigh every point of interest. We shall know how many Japanese are employed, the reasons for their engagement, the nature of the labor that they displaced, how

they are paid, lodged, and fed, their progress in social usages, their effectiveness, tractability, sobriety, and reliability. It is upon these returns that the action of the next legislature will be based, and it is certain that action of some kind will be proposed and vigorously sustained, although a continuance of the present decrease in the number of arrivals can hardly fail to have a modifying influence.

A word as to the school situation may not be amiss, for there can be no doubt that the effort to exclude Japanese pupils from the public schools has done more to wound Oriental susceptibilities than anything else. Moreover it has been effectively used in the East to show that the action of California was oppressive and unreasonable. It may be said at once that the Japanese children are well behaved and that there has been no criticism of their deportment, intelligence, or behavior. Indeed it is probably true that if all the Japanese pupils in the common schools had been bona-fide children there would be no complaint registered against them and we should never have heard of the schools question. But a great many of the Japanese pupils are not children in any sense of the word. They are grown men whose status in the schools depends of course upon their knowledge and not upon their age. The Japanese boy of eighteen or twenty years of age who can neither read nor write English must necessarily be assigned to the lower grades and placed in association with white children of a tender age. That fully grown boys, whether Japanese or not, should be placed in daily contact with girls many years younger than themselves is obviously undesirable. In the case of Asiatics it is felt to be still more undesirable, and this without any reflection upon the morals of the Asiatic, but with a recognition that his point of view is radically different. The white parent is unwilling that his little girl shall associate upon terms of comradely intimacy with a boy who may presently welcome from Japan the wife whom he has wedded through the kindly mediation of a photograph.

From such considerations, and not merely from a racial spleen, arose the first protests against the Japanese in the public schools. Popular ignorance helped of course to swell the chorus, and industrial jealousies played their accustomed part, but it is hardly surprising that the parents of San Francisco and of California in general should feel their primal rights to be infringed when they are told that they are not at liberty to invoke legislation for the pro-

tection of their own children in the schools that they themselves support at enormous cost. With the lack of such a power the principle of self-government would seem to have no meaning.

Up to the present time we have looked mainly at those classes of the community that are brought into direct contact with the Japanese, either suffering from their competition, or availing themselves, willingly or unwillingly, of their aid. But there is another class of the community whose opinions, more slowly aroused and perhaps less noisily expressed, must ultimately prevail. I mean that class whose training and environment enable them to take a comprehensive survey of the situation and to reach conclusions but little dependent upon the economic stresses of the moment. From this class come certain considerations worthy of grave attention.

According to the terms of the present laws of the United States Constitution the Japanese cannot be naturalized. They cannot become American citizens. An amalgamation, entirely foreign as it is to their own ambitions and perhaps to their potentialities, is expressly barred by the fundamental law of this country. It will be seen at once that a portentous situation is created by the presence in our midst of a large and increasing body of aliens of marked intelligence and ambition, who will not and can not merge with their environment, and whose natural clannishness serves still further to accentuate a dividing line traced alike by law, by nature, and by inclination. Is there not good reason to fear that a demarcation already marked by antipathy and by jealousy may speedily become one of hostility, and that we may even create an *imperium in imperio* dangerous to ourselves and fruitful of discord and dissension?

It is hard to determine what the status of such a caste must become. The precedent of the Chinese now in California does not help us at all. The Chinese exclusion law is rigidly enforced and the number of Chinese is decreasing, but it must be remembered that the Chinese temperament is wholly unlike that of the Japanese. The Chinaman dreads competition with the white man, and avoids it; the Japanese courts it. The Chinaman is entirely content to do those kinds of labor that the white man shrinks from; the Japanese wishes to meet the white man on his own ground, and to oust him from it. The Chinaman is willing to be a hewer of wood and a drawer of water; the Japanese has no aptitude for menial tasks nor

any intention of performing them except as stepping stones to his own high ambitions.

The Japanese in California must be either a successful competitor with the white man, or must be beaten in such competition by a lowering of the white man's standard of living, or he must be placed in a menial caste and kept there. Which choice is the greater evil? From the first two we shrink as we would from ruin. The third is perhaps the most insidious evil of them all and the most corrupting, and it is one moreover from which the Japanese himself will save us by his own ambitions. No community can remain free if it tolerates a clearly marked menial caste, if it allows the existence of such a caste to place a stigma upon any form of honorable labor. Already we see the marks of that stain upon the industries that the Asiatic has made his own. Already we see something like a "poor white" caste in the orchards and fruit fields of the state.

The Japanese problem is a thorny one. It will be solved not by popular clamor but by clear-headed statesmanship, and upon a basis of recognition that a moral principle is here involved and that our standard of right must be the ultimate benefit of the social organization that is our own.